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A STUDY OF HUNTING INFLUENCES ON FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND ADOLESCENT SELF CONCEPT

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A STUDY OF HUNTING INFLUENCES ON FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND ADOLESCENT SELF CONCEPT

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Two widespread notions in popular hunting literature are that hunting enhances family relationships and development of self-concept. However, little research has been conducted which examines the relationship between hunting and these concepts. The purposes of this study were to examine perceptions of how hunting influences family relations and to compare self-concepts among hunters and nonhunters.

Information was collected from adolescents attending a high school in western Oregon. Results indicated hunting is perceived to enhance family relationships, and significant differences in self-concept evaluations were found between hunters and nonhunters. Implications of the results are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Hunting has evolved as a family tradition in the United States. It is a tradition which has been written about by numerous popular writers, who suggest that the experience of being introduced to hunting by a relative is a special and important one. In Happy Hunting Grounds, Kermit Roosevelt (1921) spoke fondly of his introduction to hunting by his father. In Fathers and Sons, Ernest Hemingway (1934) favorably reflected on his introduction to fishing and hunting. In a more contemporary novel, Winterkill, Craig Lesley (1984) described the growing friendship of a father and son after their first elk hunt. This notion that hunting together enhances family relationships also has been cited in sporting and hunting magazines (see as examples, Kruckenberg 1983, Vance 1986).

There are some specific reasons why hunting might enhance family relationships. Hunting provides an opportunity for the relative and child to share an activity; family research indicates shared activities can enhance family relationships (Rodgers 1977). Hunting can provide opportunities for establishing a tradition--a sense of continuity within a family, something also deemed important by family researchers (Jensen 1985). Hunting also may provide opportunities for the child to acquire autonomy; perhaps the child is allowed to choose what type of firearm to use, or to make a decision about where to hunt. Support from the parents or relatives for activities in which the children engage also enhances family relationships, and this is an important influence on the child's self-concept and overall family relationship.

Finally, hunting could provide opportunities for the child and adult to share ideas, to become closer to each other. In summary, it seems as though hunting could provide families opportunities for support, continuity, shared activities, and better communication, all of which have been identified as important for maintaining good family relations.

Good family relations developed through hunting can positively affect the self-concepts of adolescents. Self-concepts are the attitudes we hold about ourselves (Rosenberg 1979). Children who experience good family relations tend to evaluate their self-concepts positively (Jensen 1985, Callan and Noller 1986, Demo et al. 1987). This is important, since research has shown that children who evaluate their self-concepts positively function better in society than individuals who do not. Evaluations of one's self-concept have been positively correlated with educational achievement (Purkey 1970), and have discriminated between juvenile delinquents and nondelinquents (Fitts and Hamner 1969). To the extent that hunting facilitates positive family relationships, it offers opportunities for maintaining or enhancing self-concept.

Although hunting might have a positive effect on adolescents, little empirical evidence substantiates this premise. This is primarily due to the complex nature of self-concept, and methodological constraints associated with studying the phenomenon. One's self-concept is influenced by numerous broad, interrelated factors (Wylie 1977). This makes it very difficult to attribute causality to one factor alone (eg.-hunting participation). Additionally, there are logistical and ethical constraints on any

attempt to isolate and control possible effects on self-concept. While it is difficult to imply causality in this situation, correlational methods offer the possibility of unraveling these complex interrelationships. Our study was an exploratory effort to unravel the interrelationships between family relations, adolescent self-concept, and hunting participation.

We sought to answer 3 questions pertaining to these relationships. Do hunting participants perceive hunting to enhance their family relationships? Is there a relationship between family relationships and self-concept? Do hunting participants more positively evaluate their self-concepts than nonhunters?

METHODS

Study Design

Data were collected from a high school sample of hunters and nonhunters. Permission was obtained from the appropriate authorities to administer a questionnaire about hunting, family relations, and self-concept to students at a Corvallis high school in western Oregon. The students were asked to complete the questionnaire in class by their sophomore English instructors.

Measures

Measures were developed to query adolescents about: frequency of hunting and related activities (e.g. - target practice) from 1985 to 1987, their perceptions of how hunting enhances self-concept and family relations, their overall self-concepts, recreation activity participation, and their perceptions of self-image characteristics of elk hunters.

Twenty-four self-concept items were selected from Offer's Self Image Questionnaire (OSIQ) to measure generalized perceptions of self-concept for all adolescents. The OSIQ was developed to measure feelings and attitudes teenagers have about themselves, and is comprised of 11 scales and 130 items and has been administered to over 15,000 adolescents (Offer et al. 1981, Petersen et al. 1984, Orr and Downes 1985, Watanabe 1985, Turner and Mo 1984, Kertesz et al. 1986). The 24 items we selected represented 3 self-concept dimensions: body/self image, social relationships, and family relationships. These dimensions were chosen since they have been consistently identified as key components of the self-concept (James 1890, Mead 1934, Allport 1955, Fitts 1965, 1972). Seven of the 24 items dealt specifically with the family relationships dimension.

Survey Administration

Hunters were asked to complete the entire survey, while nonhunters were asked only to respond to the generalized self-concept items (those which did not pertain to hunting) and to answer questions about recreation activity participation.

Respondent Description

Questionnaires were completed by 159 adolescents, while 15 others did not participate in the study at their parent or guardian's request. Thirty-seven adolescents were hunters. Ages ranged from 13 to 17 years.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were generated for all variables on the survey instrument. Frequencies were computed for responses to the family relationships and hunting questions. To examine the

relationship between family relations and self-concept, a self-concept index was computed and correlated with the family relationships statements. The index was computed by summing responses to the 24 items from the OSIQ and dividing by the number of responses. To examine differences between hunters and nonhunters, chi-square tests were conducted for these 24 self-concept items.

RESULTS

The adolescents who hunted were introduced to the sport at a young age; almost 90 percent stated they began hunting by age 13. Nearly all respondents indicated they hunted with their parents, while a few indicated they hunted with an organized group. The majority of respondents said they hunted most frequently with their father (87.5%) while only 3% said they hunted with their mother.

Adolescents pursue a variety of hunting related activities. Over three-fourths (80%) stated they had target practiced at least once between 1985 and 1987, and three-fourths said they handloaded ammunition, or helped someone do so during that time. Twenty-five percent said they subscribed to at least one hunting or sportsmen's magazine, while only about one in ten hunters stated they attended at least one hunting club meeting.

Relationship between Family Relationships and Self-Concept

Correlations between the family relations statements and the self-concept index suggested a relationship between these variables does exist (Table 1). Correlations ranged from -0.383 for the statement, "My parents are ashamed of me", to 0.614, for the statement, "I will be a source of pride to my

parents in the future."

Hunting and Family Relationships

Adolescents perceive that hunting plays a role in enhancing family relationships (Table 2). About 54 percent of the respondents agreed that "Hunting is important because it gives me the opportunity to receive his/her praise", for the lowest level of agreement, while about 87 percent agreed with the statement, "Hunting is important because it gives me the opportunity to show him/her that I am responsible." Agreement was greater than 80 percent for 2 other statements: "Hunting is important because it gives us a chance to use teamwork when we hunt," and "Hunting is important because it gives us an opportunity to plan hunts together."

Self-Concept

Hunters and nonhunters responses to Offer's self-concept statements were compared and differences were found for two statements. The greatest difference between groups was for the statement, "Being together with other people gives me a good feeling." Only 68 percent of the hunters indicated this statement described them well, as compared to 88 percent of the nonhunters (Table 3). The other difference was found for the statement, "Sometimes I think other people just do not like me." Among the hunters, 24 percent stated this described them well, as compared to 10 percent of the nonhunters.

Table 1. Correlations between Offer's Family Relationships Items and the Overall Self-concept Index.

Items	Correlation[a]
-Most of the time my parents are satisfied with me.	0.586
-When I grow up and have a family, it will be in at least in a few ways similar to my own.	0.446
-I feel I have a part in making family decisions.	0.550
-Usually I feel that I am a bother at home.	-0.386
-I think that I will be a source of pride to my parents in the future.	0.615
-My parents are usually patient with me.	0.536
-My parents are ashamed of me.	-0.383

a-all correlations are significant at $P<0.001$.

Table 2. Responses to Hunting/Family Relationships Items[a]

Items	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree
Hunting with this relative is important because it gives us a chance to:		Percent	
Shared Activity			
enjoy planning hunting trips together.	1.0	16.3	82.7
use teamwork when we hunt.	1.8	14.8	83.4
make decisions together about where we hunt.	3.5	20.0	76.5
Hunting with this relative is important because it gives me a chance to:			
Communication/Closeness			
get to know him/her better.	7.0	23.5	69.5
stay close to him/her.	7.1	21.2	71.7
Continuity			
learn about things which are important to him/her.	7.1	21.2	71.7
continue the hunting tradition in our family.	3.6	28.2	68.2
Support			
earn his/her respect.	6.3	23.2	70.5
receive his/her praise.	14.8	31.5	53.7

Table 2. (continued)

Items	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree
Hunting with this relative		Percent	
is important because it			
gives me a chance to:			
show him/her that			
I am responsible.	3.6	9.6	86.8
make him/her proud of me.	6.4	23.6	70.0
communicate better with him/her.	6.2	18.8	75.0

[a] These items were developed to measure dimensions considered important in maintaining good family relationships (Offer et al. 1981, Weller and Huchterland 1983, Hoelter and Harper 1987). Measures were operationalized using a 5 point scale where '1' equals 'Strongly Disagree' and '5' equals 'Strongly Agree'. Due to missing values, sample sizes for the adolescent items varied from 32 to 37.

Table 3. Comparison of Responses to Offer's Self-Concept Statements Among Hunters and Nonhunters.[a]

	Hunters	Non Hunters	Chi-square Statistic[b]
Social Relationships	Percent		
I prefer to be alone than with kids my own age.			2.37 (P=0.170)
Describes me	35	22	
Doesn't describe me	65	78	
If others disapprove of me I get terribly upset.			0.02 (P=0.910)
Describes me	17	17	
Doesn't describe me	83	83	
Being together with other people gives me a good feeling.			7.44 (P=0.008)
Describes me well	68	88	
Doesn't describe me	32	12	
I do not have a difficult time making friends.			1.78 (P=0.240)
Describes me	71	81	
Doesn't describe me	29	19	
I enjoy most parties I go to.			0.30 (P=0.625)
Describes me	74	79	
Doesn't describe me	26	21	
I usually feel out of place at picnics and parties.			0.27 (P=0.670)
Describes me	28	24	
Doesn't describe me	72	76	
I think that other people just do not like me.			3.88 (P=0.040)
Describes me	24	10	
Doesn't describe me	76	90	

Table 3. (continued)

	Hunters	Non Hunters	Chi-square Statistic
	Percent		
I do not mind being corrected since I can learn from it.			0.40 (P=0.875)
Describes me	78	76	
Doesn't describe me	22	24	
I find it extremely hard to make friends.			0.89 (P=0.420)
Describes me	19	13	
Doesn't describe me	81	87	
Body/Self Image			
The recent changes in my body have given me some satisfaction.			0.73 (P=0.450)
Describes me	65	74	
Doesn't describe me	35	26	
In the past year I have been very worried about my health.			0.64 (P=0.460)
Describes me	21	28	
Doesn't describe me	79	72	
The picture I have of myself in the future satisfies me.			1.78 (P=0.240)
Describes me	74	85	
Doesn't describe me	26	15	
I frequently feel ugly and unattractive.			0.56 (P=0.490)
Describes me	25	32	
Doesn't describe me	75	68	

Table 3. (continued)

	Hunters	Non Hunters	Chi-square Statistic
	Percent		
I seemed forced to imitate the people I like.			1.90 (P=0.220)
Describes me	21	12	
Doesn't describe me	79	88	
I am proud of my body.			0.69 (P=0.475)
Describes me	74	66	
Doesn't describe me	26	33	
When others look at me, they must think I am poorly developed.			0.84 (P=0.430)
Describes me	10	17	
Doesn't describe me	90	83	
Very often I think I am not at all the person I would like to be.			0.26 (P=0.670)
Describes me	28	24	
Doesn't describe me	72	76	
Family Relationships			
Most of the time my parents are satisfied with me.			0.02 (P=0.90)
Describes me	76	77	
Doesn't describe me	24	23	
When I grow up and have a family, it will be in at least in a few ways similar to my own.			0.36 (P=0.59)
Describes me	77	72	
Doesn't describe me	23	28	

Table 3. (continued)

	Hunters	Non Hunters	Chi-square Statistic
	Percent		
I feel I have a part in making family decisions.			0.27 (P=0.650)
Describes me	69	75	
Doesn't describe me	31	25	
Usually I feel that I am a bother at home.			0.23 (P=0.70)
Describes me	30	26	
Doesn't describe me	70	74	
I think that I will be a source of pride to my parents in the future.			0.00 (P=0.990)
Describes me	81	81	
Doesn't describe me	19	19	
My parents are usually patient with me.			2.61 (P=0.140)
Describes me	63	77	
Doesn't describe me	37	23	
My parents are ashamed of me.			3.64 (P=0.060)
Describes me	0	11	
Doesn't describe me	100	89	

[a] Responses ranged from '1' for 'Does Not Describe Me At All', to '6' for 'Describes Me Extremely Well'. Due to missing values and 'Does Not Apply' responses, the sample size for hunters varied from 28 to 35, and 105 to 122 for nonhunters.

[b] All Chi-square statistics are reported for 1 degree of freedom.

DISCUSSION

The introduction to this study posed 3 questions. Do hunting participants perceive hunting to enhance their family relationships? Is there a relationship between family relationships and self-concept? Do hunting participants more positively evaluate their self-concepts than nonhunters? Support was found for questions one and two. Agreement with the hunting/family relationship statements was high, and correlations ($P<0.05$) were found between Offer's family relationships and the self-concept index. Hunting appears to have an indirect effect on self-concept. Adolescents who hunt show positive support for the effect of hunting on family relations. They also have positive feelings about relationships between family relations and overall self-concept evaluations.

Regarding the third question, slight differences were found between hunters' and nonhunters' evaluations of their self-concepts, and these differences suggest hunters feel less comfortable about social relationships than nonhunters. Despite these differences, it cannot be concluded that hunters evaluate their self-concepts differently because they hunt. Other factors such as age, gender, family background, and peer acceptance exert a substantial influence on adolescent self-concept. What can be concluded, is that both groups are well adjusted, and hunting might be one of many factors which is related to adolescent self-concept.

Though we have barely touched the surface of issues in this broad area of hunting, family relationships, and adolescent self-concept, research on this topic might prove very important. As

society changes, wildife agencies will need to better understand their clientele, and the social forces which affect them. Currently, there are indications that juvenile hunting participation is declining in some states (Applegate 1982, Gilstrom 1987, Hamilton 1987). At the same time, the number of households headed by a single female are increasing, and this suggests young people may have less opportunity to be introduced to hunting, since adolescents usually have been introduced to the sport by a male relative. Given these changes, a better understanding of the relationship between hunting participation and family relationships could be crucial for wildlife managers. More information about this relationship could help understand how adolescent hunting participation might change in the future and how recruitment might be affected.

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